

# The True Story of Lady Byron's Life

Lady Byron has not spoken at all; her story has never been told.

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The reading world of America has lately been presented with a book, which is said to sell rapidly, and which appears to meet with universal favor.

The subject of the book may be thus briefly stated: the mistress of Lord Byron comes before the world for the sake of vindicating his fame from slanders and aspersions cast on him by his wife. The story of the mistress *versus* wife may be summed up as follows: —

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Lord Byron, the hero of the story, is represented as a human being endowed with every natural charm, gift, and grace, who by the one false step of an unsuitable marriage wrecked his whole life. A narrow-minded, cold-hearted

precisian, without sufficient intellect to comprehend his genius or heart to feel for his temptations, formed with him one of those mere worldly marriages common in high life, and, finding that she could not reduce him to the mathematical proprieties and conventional rules of her own mode of life, suddenly and without warning abandoned him in the most cruel and inexplicable manner.

It is alleged that she parted from him in apparent affection and good-humor, wrote him a playful, confiding letter upon the way, but, after reaching her father's house, suddenly and without explanation announced to him that she would never see him again; that this sudden abandonment drew down upon him a perfect storm of scandalous stories, which his wife never contradicted; that she never in any way or shape stated what the exact reasons for her departure had been, and thus silently gave scope to all the malice of thousands of enemies. The sensitive victim was actually driven from England, his home broken up, and he doomed to be a lonely wanderer on foreign shores.

In Italy, under bluer skies and among a gentler people, with more tolerant modes of judgment, the authoress intimates that he found peace and consolation. A lovely young Italian countess falls in love with him, and breaking her family ties for his sake, devotes herself to him, and in blissful retirement with her he finds at last that domestic life for which he was so fitted.

Soothed, calmed, and refreshed, he writes *Don Juan*, which the world is at this late hour informed was a poem with a high moral purpose, designed to be a practical illustration of the doctrine of total depravity among young gentlemen in high life.

Under the elevating influence of love, he rises at last to higher realms of moral excellence, and resolves to devote the rest of his life to some noble and heroic purpose, becomes the savior of Greece, and dies untimely, leaving a nation to mourn his loss.

The authoress dwells with a peculiar bitterness on Lady Byron's entire silence during all these years, as the most aggravated form of persecution and injury. She informs the world that Lord Byron wrote his autobiography with the purpose of giving a fair statement of the exact truth in the whole matter, and that Lady Byron bought up the manuscript of the publisher and insisted on its being destroyed unread, thus inflexibly depriving her husband of his last chance of a hearing before the tribunal of the public.

As a result of this silent, persistent cruelty on the part of a cold, correct, narrow-minded woman, the character of Lord Byron has been misunderstood, and his name transmitted to after ages clouded with aspersions and accusations which it is the object of this book to remove.

Such is the story of Lord Byron's mistress, — a story which is going the length of this American continent and rousing up new sympathy with the poet, and doing its best to bring the youth of America once more under the power of that brilliant, seductive genius from which it was hoped they had escaped.

Already we are seeing it revamped in magazine articles, which take up the slanders of the paramour and enlarge on them and wax eloquent in denunciation of the marble-hearted, insensible wife.

All this while it does not appear to occur to the thousands of unreflecting readers that they are listening merely to the story of Lord Byron's mistress and of Lord Byron, and that even by their own showing their heaviest accusation against Lady Byron is that *she has not spoken at all*; her story has never been told.

For many years after the rupture between Lord Byron and his wife, that poet's personality, fate, and happiness, had an interest for the whole civilized world, which we will venture to say was unparalleled. It is within the writer's recollection, how, in the obscure mountain town where she spent her early days, Lord Byron's separation from his wife was for a season the all-engrossing topic.

She remembers hearing her father recount at the breakfast-table the facts as they were given in the public papers, together with his own suppositions and theories of the causes.

Lord Byron's "Fare thee well," addressed to Lady Byron, was set to music and sung with tears by young schoolgirls, even in this distant America.

Madame de Staël said of this appeal, that she was sure it would have drawn her at once to his heart and his arms: *she could have forgiven everything*; and so said all the young ladies all over the world, not only in England, but in France and Germany, — wherever Byron's poetry appeared in translation.

Lady Byron's obdurate cold-heartedness in refusing even to listen to his prayers or to have any intercourse with him which might lead to reconciliation, was the one point conceded on all sides.

The stricter moralists defended her, but gentler hearts throughout all the world regarded her as a marble-hearted monster of correctness and morality, a personification of the law unmitigated by the gospel.

Literature in its highest walks busied itself with Lady Byron. Wilson, in the character of the Ettrick Shepherd, devotes several eloquent passages to expatiating on the conjugal fidelity of a poor Highland shepherd's wife, who, by patience and prayer and forgiveness, succeeds in reclaiming her drunken husband and making a good man of him; and then paints his moral by contrasting with this touching picture the cold-hearted, pharisaical correctness of Lady Byron.

Moore, in his "Life of Lord Byron," when beginning the recital of the series of disgraceful amours which formed the staple of his life in Venice, has this passage: —

"Highly censurable, in point of morality and decorum, as was his course of life while under the roof of Madame \*\*\*<sup>1</sup>, it was (with pain, I am forced to confess) venial in comparison with the strange, headlong career of license to which,

when weaned from that connection, he so unrestrainedly and, it may be added, defyingly abandoned himself. Of the state of his mind on leaving England, I have already endeavored to convey some idea, and among the feelings that went to make up that self-centred spirit of resistance which he then opposed to his fate, was an indignant scorn for his own countrymen for the wrongs he thought they had done him. For a time *the kindly sentiments which he still harbored toward Lady Byron, and a sort of vague hope, perhaps, that all would yet come right again*, kept his mind in a mood somewhat more softened and docile, as well as sufficiently under the influence of English opinions to prevent his breaking out into open rebellion against it, as he unluckily did afterward.

*"By the failure of the attempted mediation with Lady Byron, his last link with home was severed; while, notwithstanding the quiet and unobtrusive life which he led at Geneva, there was as yet, he found, no cessation of the slanderous warfare against his character; the same busy and misrepresenting spirit which had tracked his every step at home, having, with no less malicious watchfulness, dogged him into exile."*

We should like to know what the misrepresentations and slanders must have been, when this sort of thing is admitted in Mr. Moore's *justification*. It seems to us rather wonderful how anybody, unless it were a person like the Countess Guiccioli, could misrepresent a life such as even Byron's friend admits he was leading.

During all these years, when he was setting at defiance every principle of morality and decorum, the interest of the female mind all over Europe in the conversion of this brilliant prodigal son was unceasing, and reflects the greatest credit upon the faith of the sex.

Madame de Staël commenced the first effort at evangelization immediately after he left England, and found her catechumen in a most edifying state of humility. He was metaphorically on his knees in penitence, and confessed himself a miserable sinner in the loveliest manner possible. Such sweetness and humility took all hearts. His conversations with Madame de Staël were printed and circulated all over the world, making it to appear that only the inflexibility of Lady Byron stood in the way of his entire conversion.

Lady Blessington, among many others, took him in hand five or six years afterward, and was greatly delighted with his docility and edified by his frank and free confessions of his miserable offences. Nothing now seemed wanting to bring the wanderer home to the fold, but a kind word from Lady Byron. But, when the fair Countess offered to mediate, the poet only shook his head in tragic despair; "he had so many times tried in vain; Lady Byron's course had been from the first that of obdurate silence."

Any one who would wish to see a specimen of the skill of the honorable poet in mystification will do well to read a letter to Lady Byron, which Lord Byron, on parting from Lady Blessington, enclosed for her to read just before he went to Greece. He says: —

"The letter which I enclose *I was prevented from sending, by my despair of its doing any good.* I was perfectly sincere when I wrote it, and am so still. But it is difficult for me to withstand the thousand provocations on that subject which both friends and foes have for seven years been throwing in the way of a man whose feelings were once quick, and whose temper was never patient.

TO LADY BYRON, CARE OF THE HON. MRS. LEIGH, LONDON.

PISA, NOVEMBER, 17, 1821.

"I have to acknowledge the receipt of 'Ada's hair,' which is very soft and pretty, and nearly as dark already as mine was at twelve years old, if I may judge from what I recollect of some in Augusta's possession, taken at that age. But it don't curl, — perhaps from its being let grow.

"I also thank you for the inscription of the date and name, and I will tell you why; — I believe that they are the only two or three words of your handwriting in my possession. For your letters I returned, and except the two words, or rather the one word, 'Household,' written twice in an old account book, I have no other. I burnt your last note, for two reasons: firstly, it was written in a style not very agreeable; and, secondly, I wished to take your word without documents, which are the worldly resources of suspicious people.

"I suppose that this note will reach you somewhere about Ada's birthday—the 10th of December, I believe. She will then be six, so that in about twelve more I shall have some chance of meeting her; — perhaps sooner, if I am obliged to go to England by business or otherwise. Recollect, however, one thing, either in distance or nearness; — every day which keeps us asunder should, after so long a period, rather soften our mutual feelings, which must always have one rallying-point as long as our child exists, which I presume we both hope will be long after either of her parents.

"The time which has elapsed since the separation has been considerably more than the whole brief period of our union, and the not much longer one of our prior acquaintance. We both made a bitter mistake; but now it is over, and irrevocably so. For, at thirty-three on my part and a few years less on yours, though it is no very extended period of life, still it is one when the habits and thought are generally so formed as to admit of no modification; and as we could not agree when younger, we should with difficulty do so now.

"I say all this, because I own to you, that, notwithstanding everything, I considered our reunion as not impossible for more than a year after the separation; — but then I gave up the hope entirely and forever. But this very impossibility of reunion seems to me at least a reason why, on all the few points of discussion which can arise between us, we should preserve the courtesies of life, and as much of its kindness as people who are never to meet may preserve perhaps more easily than nearer connections. For my own part, I am violent, but not malignant; for only fresh provocations can awaken my resentments. To you, who are colder and more concentrated, I would just hint, that you may sometimes mistake the depth of a cold anger for dignity, and a worse feeling for duty. I assure you that I bear you *now* (whatever I may have done) no resentment whatever. Remember that, *if you have injured me in*

aught, this forgiveness is something; and that, if I have *injured you*, it is something more still, if it be true, as the moralists say, that the most offending are the least forgiving.

“Whether the offence has been solely on my side, or reciprocal, or on yours chiefly, I have ceased to reflect upon any but two things, viz. that you are the mother of my child, and that we shall never meet again. I think if you also consider the two corresponding points with reference to myself, it will be better for all three.

Yours ever,

NOEL BYRON.”

The artless Thomas Moore introduces this letter in the “Life,” with the remark: —

“There are few, I should think, of my readers, who will not agree with me in pronouncing that, if the author of the following letter had not *right* on his side, he had at least most of those good feelings which are found in general to accompany it.”

The reader is requested to take notice of the important admission that *the letter was never sent to Lady Byron at all*. It was, in fact, never intended for her, but was a nice little dramatic performance, composed simply with the view of acting on the sympathies of Lady Blessington and Byron’s numerous female admirers; and the reader will agree with us, we think, that in this point of view it was very neatly done and deserves immortality as a work of high art. For six years he had been plunging into every kind of vice and excess, pleading his shattered domestic joys, and his wife’s obdurate heart, as the apology and the impelling cause; filling the air with his shrieks and complaints concerning the slanders which pursued him, while he filled letters to his confidential correspondents with records of new mistresses. During all these years the silence of Lady Byron was unbroken, though Lord Byron not only drew in private on the sympathies of his female admirers, but employed his talents and position as an author in holding her up to contempt and ridicule, before thousands of readers. We shall quote at length his side of the story, which he published in the first Canto of Don Juan, that the reader may see how much reason he had for assuming the injured tone which he did in the letter to Lady Byron quoted above. That letter never was sent to her, and the unmanly and indecent caricature of her, and the indelicate exposure of the whole story on his own side which we are about to quote, were the only communications that could have reached her solitude.

In the following verses, Lady Byron is represented as Donna Inez, and Lord Byron as Don Jose; but the incidents and allusions were so very pointed, that nobody for a moment doubted whose history the poet was narrating.

His mother was a learned lady, famed  
For every branch of science known—  
In every Christian language ever named,  
With virtues equalled by her wit alone:

She made the cleverest people quite ashamed,  
And even the good with inward envy groaned, Finding themselves so very  
much exceeded  
In their own way, by all the things that she did.

\* \* \* \*

Her favorite science was the mathematical,  
Her noblest virtue was her magnanimity,  
Her wit (she sometimes tried at wit) was Attic all,  
Her serious sayings darkened to sublimity;  
In short, in all things she was fairly what I call  
A prodigy, — her morning-dress was dimity,  
Her evening, silk, or in the summer, muslin  
And other stuffs, with which I won't stay puzzling.

\* \* \* \*

Some women use their tongues, — she looked a lecture,  
Each eye a sermon, and her brow a homily,  
And all in all sufficient self-director,  
Like the lamented late Sir Samuel Romilly;

\* \* \* \*

In short she was a walking calculation—  
Miss Edgeworth's novels stepping from their covers,  
Or Mrs. Trimuser's books on education,  
Or Coeleb's wife set out in quest of lovers.  
Morality's prim personification,  
In which not envy's self a flaw discovers.  
To others' share 'let female errors fall,'  
For she had not even one, — the worst of all.

O, she was perfect, past all parallel  
Of any modern female saint's comparison;  
So far above the cunning powers of hell  
Her guardian angel had given up his garrison  
Even her minutest motions went as well  
As those of the best time-piece made by Harrison.  
In virtues nothing earthly could surpass her  
Save thine 'incomparable oil,' Macassar.

Perfect she was, but as perfection is  
Insipid in this naughty world of ours, —

\* \* \* \*

Don Jose like a lineal son of Eve  
Went plucking various fruits without her leave.

He was a mortal of the careless kind,  
With no great love for learning or the learn'd,  
Who chose to go where'er he had a mind,  
And never dreamed his lady was concerned;  
The world, as usual, wickedly inclined  
To see a kingdom or a house o'erturned,  
Whispered he had a mistress, some said *two*,  
But for domestic quarrels *one* will do.

Now Donna Inez had, with all her merit,  
A great opinion of her own good qualities,  
Neglect indeed requires a saint to bear it,  
And such indeed she was in her moralities;  
But then she had a devil of a spirit,  
And sometimes mixed up fancies with realities,  
And let few opportunities escape  
Of getting her liege lord into a scrape.

This was an easy matter with a man  
Oft in the wrong, and never on his guard,  
And even the wisest, do the best they can,  
Have moments, hours, and days so unprepared,  
That you might 'brain them with their lady's fan,'  
And sometimes ladies hit exceeding hard,  
And fans turn into falchions in fair hands,  
And why and wherefore no one understands.

'T is a pity learned virgins ever wed  
With persons of no sort of education;  
Or gentlemen, who, though well-born and bred,  
Grow tired of scientific conversation.  
I don't choose to say much upon this head;  
I'm a plain man, and in a single station,  
But oh! ye lords of ladies intellectual,  
Inform us truly, have they not henpecked you all?

\* \* \* \*

Don Jose and the Donna Inez led  
For some time an unhappy sort of life,  
Wishing each other not divorced, but dead;  
They lived respectably as man and wife,  
Their conduct was exceedingly well-bred,  
And gave no outward sign of inward strife,  
Until at length the smothered fire broke out,  
And put the business past all kind of doubt.

For Inez called some druggists and physicians,  
And tried to prove her loving lord was *mad*;

But as he had some lucid intermissions,  
She next decided he was only *bad*.  
Yet when they asked her for her depositions,  
No sort of explanation could be had,  
Save that her duty both to man and God  
Required this conduct, which seemed very odd.

She kept a journal where his faults were noted,  
And opened certain trunks of books and letters,  
All which might, if occasion served, be quoted.  
And then she had all Seville for abettors,  
Besides her good old grandmother (who doted);  
The hearers of her case became repeaters,  
Then advocates, inquisitors, and judges,  
Some for amusement, others for old grudges.

And then this best and meekest woman bore  
With such serenity her husband's woes;  
Just as the Spartan ladies did of yore,  
Who saw their spouses killed, and nobly chose  
Never to say a word about them more.  
Calmly she heard each calumny that rose,  
And saw *his* agonies with such sublimity,  
That all the world exclaimed, 'What magnanimity!'

This is the longest and most elaborate version of his own story that Byron ever published; but he busied himself with many others, projecting at one time a Spanish Romance, in which the same story is related in the same transparent manner; but this he was dissuaded from printing. The booksellers, however, made a good speculation in publishing what they called his domestic poems, — that is, poems bearing more or less relation to this subject.

\* \* \*

Every person with whom he became acquainted, with any degree of intimacy, was made familiar with his side of the story. Moore's biography is from first to last, in its representations, founded upon Byron's communicativeness and Lady Byron's silence; and the world at last settled down to believing that the account so often repeated and never contradicted must be substantially a true one.

The true history of Lord and Lady Byron has long been perfectly understood in many circles in England, but the facts were of a nature that could not be made public. While there was a young daughter living, whose future might be prejudiced by its recital, and while there were other persons on whom the disclosure of the real truth would have been crushing as an avalanche; Lady Byron's only course was the perfect silence in which she took refuge, and those sublime works of charity and mercy to which she consecrated her blighted earthly life.

But the time is now come when the truth may be told. All the actors in the scene have disappeared from the stage of mortal existence, and passed, let us

have faith to hope, into a world singular concurrence of circumstances, all the facts of the case, in the most undeniable and authentic form, were at one time placed in the hands of the writer of this sketch, with authority to make such use of them as she should judge best. Had this melancholy history been allowed to sleep, no public use would have been made of them; but the appearance of a popular attack on the character of Lady Byron calls for a vindication, and the true story of her married life will, therefore, now be related.

Lord Byron has described, in one of his letters, the impression left upon his mind by a young person whom he met one evening in society, and who attracted his attention by the simplicity of her dress, and a certain air, of singular purity and calmness, with which she surveyed the scene around her.

On inquiry, he was told that this young person was Miss Milbanke, an only child, and one of the largest heiresses in England.

Lord Byron was fond of idealizing his experiences in poetry, and the friends of Lady Byron had no difficulty in recognizing the portrait of Lady Byron, as she appeared at this time of her life, in his exquisite description of Aurora Raby.

There was  
Indeed a certain fair and fairy one,  
    Of the best class, and better than her class, —  
Aurora Raby, a young star who shone  
    O'er life, too sweet an image for such glass,  
A lovely being scarcely formed or moulded,  
    A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded.

\* \* \*

Early in years, and yet more infantine  
    In figure, she had something of sublime  
In eyes which sadly shone, as seraphs' shine.  
    All youth, but with an aspect beyond time;  
Radiant and grave, as pitying man's decline;  
    Mournful, but mournful of another's crime,  
She looked as if she sat by Eden's door,  
    And grieved for those who could return no more.

\* \* \*

She gazed upon a world she scarcely knew,  
    As seeking not to know it; silent, lone,  
As grows a flower, thus quietly she grew  
    And kept her heart serene within its zone.  
There was awe in the homage which she drew;  
    Her spirit seemed as seated on a throne,  
Apart from the surrounding world, and strong  
    In its own strength, most strange in one so young!

Some idea of the course which their acquaintance took, and the manner in which he was piqued into thinking of her is given in a stanza or two.

The dashing and proud air of Adeline  
    Imposed not upon her; she saw her blaze  
Much as she would have seen a glow-worm shine;  
    Then turned unto the stars for loftier rays.  
Juan was something she could not divine,  
    Being no sibyl in the new world's ways;  
Yet she was nothing dazzled by the meteor,  
    Because she did not pin her faith on feature.

His fame, too, for he had that kind of fame  
    Which sometimes plays the deuce with womankind,  
A heterogeneous mass of glorious blame,  
    Half virtues and whole vices being combined;  
Faults which attract because they are not tame;  
    Follies tricked out so brightly that they blind;  
These seals upon her wax made no impression,  
    Such was her coldness or her self-possession.

\*\*\*

Aurora sat with that indifference  
    Which piques a *preux* chevalier, — as it ought.  
Of all offences that's the worst offence,  
    Which seems to hint you are not worth a thought.

\*\*\*

To his gay nothings, nothing was replied,  
    Or something which was nothing, as urbanity  
Required. Aurora scarcely looked aside,  
    Nor even smiled enough for any vanity.  
The Devil was in the girl! Could it be pride?  
    Or modesty, or absence, or inanity?

\*\*\*

Juan was drawn thus into some attentions,  
    Slight, but select, and just enough to express,  
To females of perspicuous comprehensions,  
    That he would rather make them more than less.  
Aurora at the last (so history mentions,  
    Though probably much less a fact than guess)  
So far relaxed her thoughts from their sweet prison,  
    As once or twice to smile, if not to listen.

\*\*\*

But Juan had a sort of winning way,

A proud humility, if such there be,  
Which showed such deference to what females say,  
As if each charming word were a decree.  
His tact, too, tempered him from grave to gay,  
And taught him when to be reserved or free.  
He had the art of drawing people out,  
Without their seeing what he was about.

Aurora—who, in her indifference,  
Confounded him in common with the crowd  
Of flatterers, though she deemed he had more sense  
Than whispering foplings, or than witlings loud—  
Commenced (from such slight things will great commence)  
To feel the flattery which attracts the proud,  
Rather by deference than compliment,  
And wins even by a delicate dissent.

And then he had good looks; that point was carried  
*Nem. con.* amongst the women, . . . .  
Now though we know of old that looks deceive,  
And always have done somehow, these good looks  
Make more impression than the best of books.

Aurora, who looked more on books than faces,  
Was very young, although so very sage,  
Admiring more Minerva than the Graces,  
Especially upon a printed page.  
But virtue's self, with all her tightest laces,  
Has not the natural stays of strict old age;  
And Socrates, that model of all duty,  
Owned to a penchant, though discreet, for beauty.

The presence of this high-minded, thoughtful, unworldly woman is described through two cantos of the wild, rattling "Don Juan," in a manner that shows how deeply the poet was capable of being affected by such an appeal to his higher nature.

For instance, when Don Juan sits silent and thoughtful amid a circle of persons who are talking scandal, the poet says: —

'T is true he saw Aurora look as though  
She approved his silence; she perhaps mistook  
Its motive for that charity we owe,  
But seldom pay, the absent.

\*

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He gained esteem where it was worth the most,  
And certainly Aurora had renewed  
In him some feelings he had lately lost  
Or hardened; feelings which, perhaps ideal,

Are so divine that I must deem them real.

The love of higher things and better days,  
The unbounded hope and heavenly ignorance  
Of what is called the world and the world's ways,  
The moments when we gather from a glance  
More joy than from all future pride or praise,  
Which kindled manhood, but can ne'er entrance  
The heart is an existence of its own  
Of which another's bosom is the zone.

And full of sentiments sublime as billows  
Heaving between this world and worlds beyond,  
Don Juan, when the midnight hour of pillows  
Arrived, retired to his...

In all these descriptions of a spiritual, unworldly nature, acting on the spiritual and unworldly part of his own nature, every one who ever knew Lady Byron intimately must have recognized the model from which he drew and the experience from which he spoke, even though nothing was further from his mind than to pay this tribute to the woman he had injured, and though, before these lines, which showed how truly he knew her real character, had come one stanza of ribald, vulgar caricature, designed as a slight to her.

There was Miss Millpond, smooth as summer's sea,  
That usual paragon, an only daughter,  
Who seemed else cream of equanimity  
Till skimmed, — and then there was some milk and water.  
With a slight shade of blue too, it might be  
Beneath the surface; but what did it matter?  
Love's riotous, but marriage should have quiet,  
And, being consumptive, live on a milk diet.

The result of Byron's intimacy with Miss Milbanke and the enkindling of his nobler feelings was an offer of marriage, which she, though at the time deeply interested in him, declined with many expressions of friendship and interest. In fact, she already loved him, but had that doubt of her power to be to him all that a wife should be, which would be likely to arise in a mind so sensitively constituted and so unworldly. They however continued a correspondence as friends; on her part the interest continually increased, on his the transient rise of better feelings was choked and overgrown by the thorns of base, unworthy passions.

\* \* \*

From the height at which he might have been happy as the husband of a noble woman, he fell into the depths of a secret adulterous intrigue with a blood relation, so near in consanguinity that discovery must have been utter ruin and expulsion from civilized society.

From henceforth, this damning guilty secret became the ruling force in his life, holding him with a morbid fascination, yet filling him with remorse and

anguish and insane dread of detection. Two years after his refusal by Miss Milbanke, his various friends, seeing that for some cause he was wretched, pressed marriage upon him.

Marriage has often been represented as the proper goal and terminus of a wild and dissipated career, and it has been supposed to be the appointed mission of good women to receive wandering prodigals, with all the rags and disgraces of their old life upon them, and put rings on their hands and shoes on their feet, and introduce them, clothed and in their right minds, to an honorable career in society.

Marriage was therefore universally recommended to Lord Byron by his numerous friends and well-wishers; and so he determined to marry, and, in an hour of reckless desperation, sat down and wrote proposals to two ladies. One was declined. The other, which was accepted, was to Miss Milbanke. The world knows well that he had the gift of expression, and will not be surprised that he wrote a very beautiful letter, and that the woman who had already learned to love him fell at once into the snare.

Her answer was a frank, outspoken avowal of her love for him, giving herself to him heart and hand. The good in Lord Byron was not so utterly obliterated that he could receive such a letter without emotion, or practice such unfairness on a loving, trusting heart without pangs of remorse. He had sent the letter in mere recklessness; he had not seriously expected to be accepted, and the discovery of the treasure of affection which he had secured was like a vision of lost heaven to a soul in hell.

But, nevertheless, in his letters written about the engagement, there are sufficient evidences that his self-love was flattered at the preference accorded him by so superior a woman and one who had been so much sought. He mentions with an air of complacency that she has employed the last two years in refusing five or six of his acquaintance; that he had no idea she loved him, admitting that it was an old attachment on his part; he dwells on her virtues with a sort of pride of ownership. There is a sort of childish levity about the frankness of these letters, very characteristic of the man who skimmed over the deepest abysses with the lightest jests. Before the world, and to his intimates, he was acting the part of the successful fiancé conscious all the while of the deadly secret that lay cold at the bottom of his heart.

When he went to visit Miss Mubanke's parents, as her accepted lover, she was struck with his manner and appearance; she saw him moody and gloomy, evidently wrestling with dark and desperate thoughts, and anything but what a happy and accepted lover should be. She sought an interview with him alone, and told him that she had observed that he was not happy in the engagement, and magnanimously added that, if on review he found he had been mistaken in the nature of his feelings, she would immediately release him, and they should remain only friends.

Overcome with the conflict of his feelings, Lord Byron fainted away. Miss Milbanke was convinced that his heart must really be deeply involved in an

attachment with reference to which he showed such strength of emotion, and she spoke no more of a dissolution of the engagement.

There is no reason to doubt that Byron was, as he relates in his Dream, profoundly agonized and agitated, when he stood before God's altar, with the trusting young creature whom he was leading to a fate so awfully tragic; yet it was not the memory of Mary Chaworth, but another guiltier and more damning memory that overshadowed that hour.

The moment the carriage doors were shut upon the bridegroom and the bride, the paroxysm of remorse and despair—unrepentant remorse and angry despair—broke forth upon her gentle head.

"You might have saved me from this, madam! you had all in your own power when I offered myself to you first. Then you might have made me what you pleased; but now you will find that you have married a *devil!*"

In Miss Martineau's Sketches, recently published, is an account of the termination of this wedding journey, which brought them to one of Lady Byron's ancestral country-seats, where they were to spend the honeymoon.

Miss Martineau says: —

At the altar she did not know that she was a sacrifice; but before sunset of that winter day she knew it, if a judgment may be formed from her face and attitude of despair when she alighted from the carriage on the afternoon of her marriage-day. It was not the traces of tears which won the sympathy of the old butler who stood at the open door. The bridegroom jumped out of the carriage and walked away. The bride alighted, and came up the steps alone, with a countenance and frame agonized and listless with evident horror and despair. The old servant longed to offer his arm to the young, lonely creature, as an assurance of sympathy and protection. From this shock she certainly rallied, and soon. The pecuniary difficulties of her new home were exactly what a devoted spirit like hers was fitted to encounter. Her husband bore testimony, after the catastrophe, that a brighter being, a more sympathizing and agreeable companion, never blessed any man's home. When he afterward called her cold and mathematical, and over-pious, and so forth, it was when public opinion had gone against him, and when he had discovered that her fidelity and mercy, her silence and magnanimity, might be relied on, so that he was at full liberty to make his part good, as far as she was concerned.

Silent she was even to her own parents, whose feelings she magnanimously spared. She did not act rashly in leaving him, though she had been most rash in marrying him.

Not all at once did the full knowledge of the dreadful reality into which she had entered come upon the young wife. She knew vaguely, from the wild avowals of the first hours of their marriage, that there was a dreadful secret of guilt, that Byron's soul was torn with agonies of remorse, and that he had no love to give to her in return for a love which was ready to do and dare all for him. Yet bravely she addressed herself to the task of soothing and pleasing and calming the man whom she had taken "for better or for worse."

Young and gifted, with a peculiar air of refined and spiritual beauty; graceful in every movement, possessed of exquisite taste; a perfect companion to his mind in all the higher walks of literary culture, and with that infinite pliability to all his varying, capricious moods which true love alone can give; bearing in her hand a princely fortune, which with a woman's uncalculating generosity was thrown at his feet—there is no wonder that she might feel for a while as if she could enter the lists with the very Devil himself, and fight with a woman's weapons for the heart of her husband.

There are indications scattered through the letters of Lord Byron which, though brief indeed, showed that his young wife was making every effort to accommodate herself to him, and to give him a cheerful home. One of the poems that he sends to his publisher about this time, he speaks of as being copied by her. He had always the highest regard for her literary judgments and opinions, and this little incident shows that she was already associating herself in a wifely fashion with his aims as an author.

The poem copied by her, however, has a sad meaning which she afterwards learned to understand only too well.

There's not a joy the world can give like that it  
    takes away,  
When the glow of early thought declines in feeling's  
    dull decay;  
'T is not on youth's smooth cheek the blush alone  
    that fades so fast,  
But the tender bloom of heart is gone e'er youth  
    itself be past.

Then the few whose spirits float above the wreck  
    of happiness  
Are driven o'er the shoals of guilt or ocean of  
    excess;  
The magnet of their course is gone, or only points  
    in vain  
The shore to which their shivered sail shall never  
    stretch again.

Only a few days before she left him forever, Lord Byron sent Murray manuscripts, in Lady Byron's handwriting, of the *Siege of Corinth* and *Parisina*, and wrote: —

"I am very glad that the handwriting was a favorable omen of the *morale* of the piece; but you must not trust to that, for my copyist would write out anything I desired, in all the ignorance of innocence."

There were lucid intervals in which Lord Byron felt the charm of his wife's mind and the strength of her powers. "Bell, you could be a poet too, if you only thought so," he would say. There were summer hours in her stormy life, the memory of which never left her, when Byron was as gentle and tender as he

was beautiful; when he seemed to be possessed by a good angel, and then for a little time all the ideal possibilities of his nature stood revealed.

The most dreadful men to live with are those who thus alternate between angel and devil. The buds of hope and love called out by a day or two of sunshine are frozen again and again till the tree is killed.

But there came an hour of revelation, — an hour when, in a manner which left no kind of room for doubt, Lady Byron saw the full depth of the abyss of infamy which her marriage was expected to cover, and understood that she was expected to be the cloak and the accomplice of this infamy.

Many women would have been utterly crushed by such a disclosure; some would have fled from him immediately, and exposed and denounced the crime. Lady Byron did neither. When all the hope of womanhood died out of her heart, there arose within her, stronger, purer, and brighter, that immortal kind of love such as God feels for the sinner, — the love of which Jesus spoke and which holds the one wanderer of more account than the ninety and nine that went not astray. She would neither leave her husband nor betray him, nor yet would she for one moment justify his sin; and hence came two years of convulsive struggle, in which sometimes, for a while, the good angel seemed to gain ground, and then the evil one returned with sevenfold vehemence.

Lord Byron argued his case with himself and with her, with all the sophistries of his powerful mind. He repudiated Christianity as authority, asserted the right of every human being to follow out what he called "the impulses of nature." Subsequently he introduced into one of his dramas the reasoning by which he justified himself in incest.

In the drama of Cain, Adah the sister and the wife of Cain thus addresses him:

—  
Cain! walk not with this spirit,  
Bear with what we have born, and love me—I  
Love thee.

*Lucifer.* More than thy mother and thy sire?

*Adah.* I do. Is that a sin too?

*Lucifer.* No, not yet;  
It one day will be in your children.

*Adah.* What!

Must not my daughter love her brother Enoch?

*Lucifer.* Not as thou lovest Cain.

*Adah.* O, my God!

Shall they not love and bring forth things that love  
Out of their love? have they not drawn their milk  
Out of this bosom? was not he, their father,  
Born of the same sole womb, in the same hour  
With me? did we not love each other? and  
In multiplying our being multiply  
Things which will love each other as we love  
Them? — And as I love thee, my Cain! go not

Forth with this spirit, he is not of ours.

*Lucifer.* The sin I speak of is not of my making,  
And cannot be a sin in you, — whate'er  
It seems in those who will replace ye in  
Mortality.

*Adah.* What is the sin which is not  
Sin in itself? can circumstance make sin  
Of virtue? if it doth, we are the slaves  
Of —

Lady Byron, though slight and almost infantine in her bodily presence, had the soul, not only of an angelic woman, but of a strong, reasoning man. It was the writer's lot to know her at a period when she formed the personal acquaintance of many of the very first minds of England; but, among all with whom this experience brought her in connection, there was none who impressed her so strongly as Lady Byron. There was an almost supernatural power of moral divination, a grasp of the very highest and most comprehensive things, that made her lightest opinions singularly impressive. No doubt this result was wrought out in a great degree from the anguish and conflict of these two years, when, with no one to help or counsel her but Almighty God, she wrestled and struggled with fiends of darkness for the redemption of her husband's soul.

She followed him through all his sophistical reasonings with a keener reason. She besought and implored, in the name of his better nature, and by all the glorious things that he was capable of being and doing; and she had just power enough to convulse and shake and agonize, but not power enough to subdue.

One of the first of living writers, in the novel of "Romola," has given, in her masterly sketch of the character of Tito, the whole history of the conflict of a woman like Lady Byron with a nature like that of her husband. She has described a being full of fascinations and sweetesses, full of generosities and of good-natured impulses; a nature that could not bear to give pain, or to see it in others, but entirely destitute of any firm moral principle; she shows how such a being, merely by yielding step by step to the impulses of passion, and disregarding the claims of truth and right, becomes involved in a fatality of evil, in which deceit, crime, and cruelty are a necessity, forcing him to persist in the basest ingratitude to the father who has done all for him, and hard-hearted treachery to the high-minded wife who has given herself to him wholly.

There are few scenes in literature more fearfully tragic than the one between Romola and Tito, when he finally discovers that she knows him fully, and can be deceived by him no more. Some such hour always must come for strong, decided natures irrevocably pledged, one to the service of good and the other to the slavery of evil. The demoniac cried out: "What have I to do with thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to torment me before the time?" The presence of all-pitying purity and love was a torture to the soul possessed by the demon of evil.

These two years, in which Lady Byron was with all her soul struggling to bring her husband back to his better self, were a series of passionate convulsions.

During this time, such was the disordered and desperate state of his worldly affairs, that there were ten executions for debt levied on their family establishment; and it was Lady Byron's fortune each time which settled the account.

Toward the last she and her husband saw less and less of each other, and he came more and more decidedly under evil influences and seemed to acquire a sort of hatred of her.

Lady Byron once said significantly to a friend who spoke of some causeless dislike in another: "My dear, I have known people to be hated for no other reason than because they impersonated conscience."

The biographers of Lord Byron and all his apologists are careful to narrate how sweet, and amiable, and obliging he was to everybody who approached him; and the saying of Fletcher, his man-servant, that "*anybody* could do anything with my Lord, except my Lady," has often been quoted.

The reason of all this will now be evident. "My Lady," was the only one fully understanding the deep and dreadful secrets of his life who had the courage resolutely and persistently and inflexibly to plant herself in his way and insist upon it that, if he went to destruction, it should be in spite of her best efforts.

He had tried his strength with her fully. The first attempt had been to make her an accomplice by sophistry; by destroying her faith in Christianity, and confusing her sense of right and wrong, to bring her into the ranks of those convenient women who regard the marriage tie only as a friendly alliance to cover license on both sides.

When her husband described to her the continental latitude, — the good-humored marriage, in which complaisant couples mutually agreed to form the cloak for each other's infidelities, — and gave her to understand that in this way alone she could have a peaceful and friendly life with him, she answered him simply: "I am too truly your friend to do this."

When Lord Byron found that he had to do with one who would not yield, who knew him fully, who could not be blinded and could not be deceived, he determined to rid himself of her altogether.

It was when the state of affairs between herself and her husband seemed darkest and most hopeless, that the only child of this union was born. Lord Byron's treatment of his wife during the sensitive period that preceded the birth of this child, and during her confinement, was marked by paroxysms of unmanly brutality, for which the only possible charity on her part was the supposition of insanity. Moore sheds a significant light on this period, by telling us that about this time Byron was often drunk day after day with Sheridan. There had been insanity in the family, and this was the plea which Lady Byron's love put in for him. She regarded him as, if not insane, at least so nearly approaching the boundaries of insanity as to be a subject of

forbearance and tender pity and she loved him with that love resembling a mother's, which good wives often feel when they have lost all faith in their husbands' principles, and all hopes of their affections. Still she was in heart and soul his best friend, true to him with a truth which he himself could not shake.

In the verses addressed to his daughter, Lord Byron speaks of her as

The child of love, though born in bitterness,  
And nurtured in convulsion.

A day or two after the birth of this child, Lord Byron came suddenly into Lady Byron's room, and told her that her mother was dead. It was an utter falsehood, but it was only one of the many nameless injuries and cruelties by which he expressed his hatred of her. A short time after her confinement, she was informed by him, in a note, that as soon as she was able to travel she must go, — that he could not and would not longer have her about him; and, when her child was only five weeks old, he carried this threat of expulsion into effect.

Here we will insert briefly Lady Byron's own account—the only one she ever gave to the public—of this separation. The circumstances under which this brief story was written are affecting.

Lord Byron was dead. The whole account between him and her was closed forever in this world. Moore's "Life" had been prepared, containing simply and solely Lord Byron's own version of their story. Moore sent this version to Lady Byron, and requested to know if she had any remarks to make upon it. In reply, she sent a brief statement to him, — the first and only one that had come from her during all the years of the separation, and which appears to have mainly for its object the exculpation of her father and mother from the charge made by the poet of being the instigators of the separation.

In this letter she says, with regard to their separation: —

"The facts are: I left London for Kirby Mallory, the residence of my father and mother, on the 15th of January, 1816. LORD BYRON HAD SIGNIFIED TO ME IN WRITING, JANUARY 6TH, HIS ABSOLUTE DESIRE THAT I SHOULD LEAVE LONDON ON THE EARLIEST DAY THAT I COULD CONVENIENTLY FIX. It was not safe for me to undertake the fatigue of a journey sooner than the 15th. Previously to my departure it had been strongly impressed upon my mind that Lord Byron was under the influence of insanity. This opinion was derived, in a great measure, from the communications made me by his nearest relatives and personal attendant, who had more opportunity than myself for observing him during the latter part of my stay in town. It was even represented to me that he was in danger of destroying himself.

"*With the concurrence of his family*, I had consulted Dr. Baillie as a friend, January 8th, respecting the supposed malady. On acquainting him with the state of the case, and with Lord Byron's desire that I should leave London, Dr. Baillie thought that my absence might be advisable as an experiment, assuming the fact of mental derangement; for Dr. Baillie, not having had

access to Lord Byron, could not pronounce a positive opinion on that point. He enjoined that, in correspondence with Lord Byron, I should avoid all but light and soothing topics. Under these impressions I left London, determined to follow the advice given by Dr. Baillie. Whatever might have been the conduct of Lord Byron toward me from the time of my marriage, yet, supposing him to be in a state of mental alienation, it was not for me, nor for any person of common humanity, to manifest at that moment a sense of injury."

Nothing more than this letter from Lady Byron is necessary to substantiate the fact that she did not *leave* her husband, but *was driven* from him, — driven from him that he might give himself up to the guilty infatuation that was consuming him, without being tortured by her imploring face and by the silent power of her presence and her prayers.

For a long time before this she had seen little of him. On the day of her departure she passed by the door of his room, and stopped to caress his favorite spaniel, which was lying there; and she confessed to a friend the weakness of feeling a willingness even to be something as humble as that poor little creature, might she only be allowed to remain and watch over him. She went into the room where he and the partner of his sins were sitting together, and said, "Byron, I come to say good bye," offering at the same time her hand.

Lord Byron put his hands behind him, retreated to the mantel-piece, and, looking round on the two that stood there with a sarcastic smile, said, "When shall we three meet again?" Lady Byron answered, "In Heaven, I trust," and those were her last words to **him on earth.**

Now, if the reader wishes to understand the real talents of Lord Byron for deception and dissimulation, let him read, with this story in his mind, the "Fare thee well," which he addressed to Lady Byron through the printer: —

Fare thee well, and if forever,  
Still forever fare thee well.  
Even though unforgiving, never  
    ¶Against thee shall my heart rebel.

Would that breast were bared Before thee,  
    Where thy head so oft hath lain,  
While that placid sleep came o'er thee  
    Thou canst never know again.

Though my many faults defaced me,  
    Could no other arm be found  
Than the one which once embraced me  
    To inflict a cureless wound?

The reaction of society against him at the time of the separation from his wife was something which he had not expected, and for which, it appears, he was entirely unprepared. It broke up the guilty intrigue, and drove him from England. He had not courage to meet or endure it. The world, to be sure, was very far from suspecting what the truth was, but the tide was setting against him with such vehemence as to make him tremble every hour lest the whole

should be known; and henceforth it became a warfare of desperation to make his story good, no matter at whose expense.

He had tact enough to perceive at first that the assumption of the pathetic and the magnanimous, and general confessions of faults, accompanied with admissions of his wife's goodness, would be the best policy in his case. In this mood he thus writes to Moore: —

"The fault was not in my choice (unless in choosing at all), for I do not believe and I must say it, in the very dregs of all this bitter business, that there ever was a better, or even a brighter, a kinder, or a more amiable, agreeable being than Lady Byron. I never had, nor can have, any reproach to make her while with me. Where there is blame, it belongs to myself."

As there must be somewhere a scapegoat to bear the sin of the affair, Lord Byron wrote a poem called "A Sketch," in which he lays the blame of stirring up strife on a friend and former governess of Lady Byron's, but in this sketch he introduces the following just eulogy on Lady Byron: —

Foiled was perversion by that youthful mind  
Which flattery fooled not, baseness could not blind,  
Deceit infect not, near contagion soil,  
Indulgence weaken, nor example spoil,  
Nor mastered science tempt her to look down  
On humbler talents with a pitying frown,  
Nor genius swell, nor beauty render vain,  
Nor envy ruffle to retaliate pain,  
Nor fortune change, pride raise, nor passion bow  
Nor virtue teach austerity, — till now.  
Serenely purest of her sex that live,  
But wanting one sweet weakness, — to forgive.  
Too shocked at faults her soul can never know,  
She deemed that all could be like her below.  
Foe to all vice, yet hardly virtue's friend,  
For virtue pardons those she would amend.

In leaving England, Lord Byron first went to Switzerland, where he conceived and in part wrote out the tragedy of "Manfred." Moore speaks of his domestic misfortunes, and the sufferings which he underwent at this time, as having an influence in stimulating his genius, so that he was enabled to write with a greater power.

Anybody who reads the tragedy of "Manfred" with this story in his mind will see that it is true.

The hero is represented as a gloomy misanthrope, dwelling with impenitent remorse on the memory of an incestuous passion which has been the destruction of his sister for this life and the life to come; but which, to the very last gasp, he despairingly refuses to repent of, even while he sees the fiends of darkness rising to take possession of his departing soul. That Byron knew his own guilt well, and judged himself severely, may be gathered from passages in this poem, which are as powerful as human language can be made. For

instance, this part of the "Incantation," which Moore says was written at this time: —

Though thy slumber may be deep,  
Yet thy spirit shall not sleep;  
There are shades which will not vanish,  
There are thoughts thou canst not banish;  
By a power to thee unknown,  
Thou canst never be alone;  
Thou art rapt as with a shroud,  
Thou art gathered in a cloud;  
And forever shalt thou dwell  
In the spirit of this spell

\* \* \*

From thy false tears I did distil  
An essence which had strength to kill;  
From thy own heart I then did wring  
The black blood in its blackest spring;  
From thy own smile I snatched the snake,  
For there it coiled as in a brake  
From thy own lips I drew the charm  
Which gave all these their chiefest harm;  
In proving every poison known  
I found the strongest was thine own.

By thy cold breast and serpent smile,  
By thy unfathomed gulfs of guile,  
By that most seeming virtuous eye,  
By thy shut soul's hypocrisy,  
By the perfection of thine art  
Which passed for human thine own heart,  
By thy delight in others' pain,  
And by thy brotherhood of Cain,  
I call upon thee ! and compel  
Thyself to be thy proper hell!

Again, he represents Manfred as saying to the old Abbot, who seeks to bring him to repentance: —

Old man, there is no power in holy men,  
Nor charm in prayer, nor purifying form  
Of penitence, nor outward look, nor fast,  
Nor agony, nor, greater than all these,  
The innate tortures of that deep despair,  
Which is remorse without the fear of hell,  
But all in all sufficient to itself,  
Would make a hell of heaven, can exorcise  
From out the unbounded spirit the quick sense  
Of its own sins, wrongs, sufferance, and revenge

Upon itself; there is no future pang  
Can deal that justice on the self-condemned  
He deals on his own soul.

And when the Abbot tells him,

All this is well,  
For this will pass away, and be succeeded  
By an auspicious hope, which shall look up  
With calm assurance to that blessed place  
Which all who seek may win, whatever be  
Their earthly errors,

he answers,

It is too late.

Then the old Abbot soliloquizes: —

This should have been a noble creature; he  
Hath all the energy which would have made  
A goodly frame of glorious elements,  
Had they been wisely mingled; as it is,  
It is an awful chaos, — light and darkness,  
And mind and dust, and passions and pure thoughts  
Mixed, and contending without end or order.

The world can easily see, in Moore's biography, what, after this, was the course of Lord Byron's life, — how he went from shame to shame, and dishonor to dishonor, and used the fortune which his wife brought him in the manner described in those private letters which his biographer was left to print. Moore, indeed, says Byron had made the resolution not to touch his lady's fortune, but adds that it required more self-command than he possessed to carry out so honorable a purpose.

Lady Byron made but one condition with him. She had him in her power, and she exacted that the unhappy partner of his sins should not follow him out of England, and that the ruinous intrigue should be given up. Her inflexibility on this point kept up that enmity which was constantly expressing itself in some publication or other, and which drew her and her private relations with him before the public.

The story of what Lady Byron did with the portion of her fortune which was reserved to her is a record of noble and skillfully administered charities. Pitiful and wise and strong, there was no form of human suffering or sorrow that did not find with her refuge and help. She gave not only systematically, but also impulsively.

Miss Martineau claims for her the honor of having first invented practical schools, in which the children of the poor were turned into agriculturists, artisans, seamstresses, and good wives for poor men. While she managed with admirable skill and economy permanent institutions of this sort, she was

always ready to relieve suffering in any form. The fugitive slaves, William and Ellen Crafts, escaping to England, were fostered by her protecting care.

In many cases, where there was distress or anxiety from poverty among those too self-respecting to make their sufferings known, the delicate hand of Lady Byron ministered to the want with a consideration which spared the most refined feelings.

As a mother, her course was embarrassed by peculiar trials. The daughter inherited from the father not only brilliant talents, but a restlessness and morbid sensibility which might be too surely traced to the storms and agitations of the period in which she was born. It was necessary to bring her up in ignorance of the true history of her mother's life, and the consequence was that she could not fully understand that mother.

During her early girlhood, her career was a source of more anxiety than of comfort. She married a man of fashion, ran a brilliant course as a gay woman of fashion, and died early of a lingering and painful disease.

In the silence and shaded retirement of the sick-room, the daughter came wholly back to her mother's arms and heart; and it was on that mother's bosom that she leaned, as she went down into the dark valley. It was that mother who placed her weak and dying hand in that of her Almighty Saviour.

To the children left by her daughter she ministered with the faithfulness of a guardian angel; and it is owing to her influence that those who yet remain are among the best and noblest of mankind.

The person whose relations with Byron had been so disastrous, also, in the latter years of her life, felt Lady Byron's loving and ennobling influences, and in her last sickness and dying hours looked to her for consolation and help.

There was an unfortunate child of sin, born with the curse upon her, over whose wayward nature Lady Byron watched with a mother's tenderness. She was the one who could have patience when the patience of every one else failed; and though her task was a difficult one, from the strange, abnormal propensities to evil in the object of her cares, yet Lady Byron never faltered and never gave over, till death took the responsibility from her hands.

During all this trial, strange to say, her belief that the good in Lord Byron would finally conquer was unshaken.

To a friend who said to her, "O, how could you love him!" she answered, briefly, "My dear, there was the angel in him." It is in us all.

It was in this angel that she had faith. It was for the deliverance of this angel from degradation and shame and sin that she unceasingly prayed. She read every work that Byron wrote, — read it with a deeper knowledge than any human being but herself could possess. The ribaldry and the obscenity and the insults, with which he strove to make her ridiculous in the world, fell at her pitying feet unheeded.

When he broke away from all this unworthy life to devote himself to a manly enterprise for the redemption of Greece, she thought that she saw the beginning of an answer to her prayers. Even although one of his latest acts concerning her was to repeat to Lady Blessington the false accusation which made Lady Byron the author of all his errors, she still had hopes, from the one step taken in the right direction.

In the midst of these hopes came the news of his sudden death. On his death-bed, it is well known that he called his confidential English servant to him, and said to him, "Go to my sister—tell her—go to Lady Byron—you will see her and say"—

Here followed twenty minutes of indistinct mutterings, in which the names of his wife, daughter, and sister frequently occurred. He then said, "Now, I have told you all."

"My Lord," replied Fletcher, "I have not understood a word your Lordship has been saying."

"Not understand me!" exclaimed Lord Byron with a look of the utmost distress, "what a pity!—then it is too late—all is over!" He afterwards, says Moore, tried to utter a few words, of which none were intelligible except "my sister—my child."

When Fletcher returned to London, Lady Byron sent for him, and walked the room in convulsive struggles to repress her tears and sobs, while she over and over again strove to elicit something from him which should enlighten her upon what that last message had been; but in vain, — the gates of eternity were shut in her face, and not a word had passed to tell her if he had repented.

For all that, Lady Byron never doubted his salvation. Ever before her, during the few remaining years of her widowhood, was the image of her husband, purified and ennobled, with the shadows of earth forever dissipated, the stains of sin forever removed, — "the angel in him," as she expressed it, "made perfect, according to its divine ideal."

Never has more divine strength of faith and love existed in woman. Out of the depths of her own loving and merciful nature, she gained such views of the Divine love and mercy as made all hopes possible. There was no soul of whose future Lady Byron despaired. Such was her boundless faith in the redeeming power of love.

After Byron's death, the life of this delicate creature—so frail in body that she seemed always hovering on the brink of the eternal world, yet so strong in spirit and so unceasing in her various ministries of mercy—was a miracle of mingled weakness and strength.

To talk with her seemed to the writer of this sketch the nearest possible approach to talking with one of the spirits of the just made perfect.

She was gentle, artless, approachable as a little child, with ready, outflowing sympathy for the cares and sorrows and interests of all who approached her, with a naïve and gentle playfulness, that adorned, without hiding, the breadth and strength of her mind, and, above all, with a clear, divining, moral discrimination, never mistaking wrong for right in the slightest shade, yet with a mercifulness that made allowance for every weakness and pitied every sin.

There was so much of Christ in her, that to have seen her seemed to be to have drawn near to heaven. She was one of those few whom absence cannot estrange from friends, whose mere presence in this world seems always a help to every generous thought, a strength to every good purpose, a comfort in every sorrow.

Living so near the confines of the spiritual world, she seemed already to see into it. Hence the words of comfort which she addressed to a friend who had lost a son: —

Dear friend, remember, as long as our loved ones are in *God's* world, they are in *ours*.

It has been thought by some friends who have read the proof-sheets of the foregoing, that the author should state more specifically her authority for these statements.

The circumstances which led the writer to England at a certain time originated a friendship and correspondence with Lady Byron, which was always regarded as one of the greatest acquisitions of that visit.

On the occasion of a second visit to England, in 1856, the writer received a note from Lady Byron, indicating that she wished to have some private, confidential conversation upon important subjects, and inviting her for that purpose to spend a day with her at her country-seat near London.

The writer went and spent a day with Lady Byron alone, and the object of the invitation was explained to her. Lady Byron was in such a state of health that her physicians had warned her that she had very little time to live. She was engaged in those duties and retrospections which every thoughtful person finds necessary, when coming deliberately and with open eyes to the boundaries of this mortal life.

At that time there was a cheap edition of Byron's works in contemplation, intended to bring his writings into circulation among

the masses, and the pathos arising from the story of his domestic misfortunes was one great means relied on for giving it currency.

Under these circumstances, some of Lady Byron's friends had proposed the question to her, *whether she had not a responsibility to society for the truth*; whether *she did right* to allow these writings to gain influence over the popular mind, by giving a silent consent to what she knew to be utter falsehoods.

Lady Byron's whole life had been passed in the most heroic self-abnegation and self-sacrifice, and she had now to consider whether one more act of self-denial was not required of her before leaving this world, — namely, to declare the absolute truth, no matter at what expense to her own feelings.

For this reason it was her desire to recount the whole history to a person of another country, and entirely out of the sphere of personal and local feelings which might be supposed to influence those in the country and station in life where the events really happened, in order that she might be helped by such a person's views in making up an opinion as to her own duty.

The interview had almost the solemnity of a death-bed avowal. Lady Byron stated the facts which have been embodied in this article, and gave to the writer a paper containing a brief memorandum of the whole, with the dates affixed.

We have already spoken of that singular sense of the reality of the spiritual world which seemed to encompass Lady Byron during the last part of her life, and which made her words and actions seem more like those of a blessed being detached from earth than of an ordinary mortal. All her modes of looking at things, all her motives of action, all her involuntary exhibitions of emotion were so high above any common level, and so entirely regulated by the most unworldly causes, that it would seem difficult to make the ordinary world understand exactly how the thing seemed to lie before her mind. What impressed the writer more strongly than anything else was Lady Byron's perfect conviction that her husband was now a redeemed spirit; that he looked back with pain and shame and regret on all that was unworthy in his past life; and that, if he could speak or could act in the case, he would desire to prevent the farther circulation of base falsehoods, and of seductive poetry, which had been made the vehicle of morbid and unworthy passions.

Lady Byron's experience had led her to apply the powers of her strong philosophical mind to the study of mental pathology, and she

had become satisfied that the solution of the painful problem which first occurred to her as a young wife was, after all, the true one, — namely, that Lord Byron had been one of those unfortunately constituted persons in whom the balance of nature is so critically hung that it is always in danger of dipping towards insanity, and that in certain periods of his life he was so far under the influence of mental disorder as not to be fully responsible for his actions.

She went over, with a brief and clear analysis, the history of his whole life as she had thought it out during the lonely musings of her widowhood. She dwelt on the ancestral causes that gave him a nature of exceptional and dangerous susceptibility. She went through the mismanagements of his childhood, the history of his schooldays, the influence of the ordinary school course of classical reading on such a mind as his. She sketched boldly and clearly the internal life of the young men of the time as she with her purer eyes had looked through it, and showed how habits, which with less susceptible fibre and coarser strength of nature were tolerable for his companions, were deadly to him, unhinging his nervous system, and intensifying the dangers of ancestral proclivities. Lady Byron expressed the feeling, too, that the Calvinistic theology, as heard in Scotland, had proved in his case, as it often does in certain minds, a subtle poison. He never could either disbelieve or become reconciled to it, and the sore problems it proposes embittered his spirit against Christianity.

“The worst of it is, I *do believe*,” he would often say with violence, when he had been employing all his powers of reason, wit, and ridicule upon these subjects.

Through all this sorrowful history was to be seen, not the care of a slandered woman to make her story good, but the pathetic anxiety of a mother who treasures every particle of hope, every intimation of good, in the son whom she cannot cease to love. With indescribable resignation, she dwelt on those last hours, those words addressed to her never to be understood till repeated in eternity.

But all this she looked upon as forever past; believing that, with the dropping of the earthly life, these morbid impulses and influences ceased, and that higher nature which he often so beautifully expressed in his poems became the triumphant one.

While speaking on this subject her pale, ethereal face became luminous with a heavenly radiance; there was something so sublime in her belief in the victory of love over evil, that faith with her seemed to have become sight. She seemed so clearly to perceive the divine ideal of the man she had loved and for whose salvation she had been

called to suffer and labor and pray, that all memories of his past unworthiness fell away and were lost.

Her love was never the doting fondness of weak women; it was the appreciative and discriminating love by which a higher nature recognized godlike capabilities under all the dust and defilement of misuse and passion; and she never doubted that the love, which in her was so strong that no injury or insult could shake it, was yet stronger in the God who made her capable of such a devotion, and that in Him it was accompanied by power to subdue all things to itself.

The writer was so impressed and excited by the whole scene and recital that she begged for two or three days to deliberate, before forming any opinion. She took the memorandum with her, returned to London and gave a day or two to the consideration of the subject. The decision which she made was chiefly influenced by her reverence and affection for Lady Byron. She seemed so frail, she had suffered so much, she stood at such a height above the comprehension of the coarse and common world, that the author had a feeling that it would almost be like violating a shrine, to ask her to come forth from the sanctuary of a silence where she had so long abode and plead her cause. She wrote to Lady Byron that while this act of justice did seem to be called for, and to be in some respects most desirable, yet, as it would involve so much that was painful to her, the writer considered that Lady Byron would be entirely justifiable in leaving the truth to be disclosed after her death, and recommended that all the facts necessary should be put in the hands of some person, to be so published.

Years passed on. Lady Byron lingered four years after this interview, to the wonder of her physicians and all her friends.

After Lady Byron's death the writer looked anxiously, hoping to see a memoir of the person whom she considered the most remarkable woman that England has produced in the century. No such memoir has appeared on the part of her friends; and the mistress of Lord Byron has the ear of the public, and is sowing far and wide unworthy slanders, which are eagerly gathered up and read by an undiscriminating community.

There may be family reasons in England which prevent Lady Byron's friends from speaking; but Lady Byron has an American name and an American existence, and reverence for pure womanhood is, we think, a national characteristic of the American; and, so far as this country

is concerned, we feel that the public should have this refutation of the slanders of the Countess Guiccioli's book.



**HARRIET BEECHER STOWE** was an author and social activist, best known for her abolitionist novel Uncle Tom's Cabin. She was a founder of The Atlantic.